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FOUR YEARS OF ENGLISH LIBERALISM.

BY BRITANNICUS.

GREAT BRITAIN, as I write, is in the throes of a General Election, the issue of which will be known before this article appears in print. I shall not, therefore, be so foolish as to attempt to forecast it. But it is difficult to believe that there can be any result but one of the appeal that is now being taken to the electorate. England in many eyes would almost have ceased to be England if she did not reject the claim of the House of Lords to control the national finances. But apart from that transcendent issue the Liberals are fortified in their hopes of victory by the record they have established during the past four years. It is this record I propose to examine, a record of legislative energy unique, I think, in British history and one that not only exemplifies the range and effectiveness of the British Parliament as a law-making instrument, but that can hardly fail to interest students of political tendencies and social reformers everywhere.

When the Liberals, in January, 1906, came back to power they had been out of office for virtually twenty years. It is true that a Liberal Ministry reigned from 1892 to 1895. It reigned, but it did not rule. It was dependent on the Irish vote for its very existence; its majority rarely rose above forty; the House of Lords did much as it pleased with its measures; and the retirement of Mr. Gladstone and the accession of Lord Rosebery to the Premiership produced an outburst of internal dissension. With that exception, if it can be called an exception, the Liberals had been excluded from office since the middle eighties. The pendulum was slow to swing to their side, but when it did swing it was with shattering effects. The Liberals rode into power in 1906 with one of the largest majorities in the annals of British Parliaments. They had a clear plurality over all other parties

combined of eighty-eight; and their forces when allied with those of the Irish Nationalists and of the Labor group outnumbered the Unionists by no less than 356. They owed their triumph to many causes. They were greatly helped by the folly of the Unionists in permitting the introduction into the Transvaal mines of Chinese laborers under conditions that shocked the moral sense of England. They were also helped by the unmeasured hostility of the Nonconformists towards the Education Act of 1902. In all constituencies where no Labor candidate was running the Labor vote went to swell the Liberal majority, chiefly because the Unionist Government had done nothing to reverse the judicial decisions that made Trades-Unions liable for damages and declared picketing illegal. Again, the Licensing Act passed by Mr. Balfour's Cabinet was regarded by many Englishmen who were far from being Temperance agitators as an unworthy surrender to the brewers. These were tangible allies on the Liberal side, and their influence was considerably increased by the inevitable discontent that fastens upon any Government that has been long in power, by the memory of several grave administrative scandals arising out of the South-African war, and, above all, by the conviction that Mr. Balfour's failure to make his fiscal policy intelligible to the multitude, and his tactics of evasion and subterfuge, dishonored both the country and the Parliament. All this, undoubtedly, had its weight. But beyond everything else was the question of maintaining Free Trade. The enormous majority polled by the Liberals was first and foremost an emphatic repudiation by the country of Mr. Chamberlain's Protectionist propaganda.

The Liberals, then, were returned to uphold Free Trade, to make an end of Chinese Labor, to amend the Licensing and Education Acts of the preceding Government, to carry out a long-overdue programme of social and industrial reform and to reverse by legislation the decision of the courts in the famous Taff Vale case. By this decision Trades-Unions were adjudged liable to damages for wrongful acts committed by their officials during the conduct of a strike. In this way the payments which Trade-Unionists had made to the "benefit" funds of their organization could be debited with whatever damages a court of law might inflict for torts committed during a strike by Trade-Union officials. Again, the law was in a state of chaos on the subject of

"picketing." John Jones might advise people not to work for the Great Western Railway. If the officials of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants did the same thing they broke the law. One person could not "conspire"; a number of persons could. Recent decisions, moreover, had declared that Trades-Unions, as corporations, were not only legally capable of doing wrong, but far more capable than private individuals. The Liberal Government within a few months after taking office passed a Bill, the Trades Disputes Bill, which secured complete immunity for all Trade-Union funds, legalized peaceful picketing and laid down the principle that any act lawful in the eye of the civil and criminal codes if done by an individual is not unlawful if done by a combination. To Americans such privileges have probably an ominous sound, but as a matter of fact the Trades Dispute Bill of 1906 did no more than confirm the British Trade-Unions in the possession of rights which they had already enjoyed for over a quarter of a century.

In the same year the Government passed a Workmen's Compensation Act. This Act amended and consolidated the law as to compensation for injuries, extended its benefits to seamen and shipmasters, shop assistants, postmen, domestic servants, and to all employees whose annual remuneration was less than \$1,250, awarded compensation for all injuries causing more than one week's incapacity, established a special scale of compensation for persons under twenty-one earning less than five dollars a week, and made provision for facilitating the computation of the amount due as compensation, for safeguarding workmen against oppressive agreements, for regulating the disbursement of the amounts payable to dependents of deceased workmen, and for enabling the services of medical referees to be more fully utilized. Another Act, also passed in 1906, considerably simplified and improved the system of reporting accidents in mines, quarries, factories and workshops. A third Act of the same year, the Merchant Shipping Act, established for the first time a compulsory food scale on board ship, secured on all foreign-going ships the carrying of a certificated cook, increased the space that must be given to the accommodation of the crew, imposed on foreign ships in British ports the same regulations as to load-line, life-saving appliances, grain cargoes and unseaworthiness as are applicable to British ships, and prohibited the granting of any fresh pilotage

certificates to aliens. A more recent Act, passed in 1909 and called the Trade Boards Act, attacked the industrial and social evil of sweating. It set up for certain trades Boards composed of representatives of employers and of workers in equal numbers, with official members appointed by the Board of Trade. The duty of the Trade Boards is to fix minimum rates of wages for both time-work and piece-work in the following trades: (1) ready-made and bespoke wholesale tailoring; (2) cardboard-box making; (3) machine-made lace and net finishing; and (4) ready-made blouse making. The Act provided also that other trades might from time to time be added to the list.

When Mr. Lloyd George was President of the Board of Trade he passed two very useful Acts, one ordering a regular census of British production—a census that will reveal for the first time the dimensions of the home trade—and another providing that patents held in Great Britain must be worked in Great Britain under penalty of being revoked. But his greatest triumph was the settlement at the end of 1907 of what at one moment threatened to be the greatest strike in the history of British railways. He averted it by setting up Conciliation Boards between masters and men to which all questions of hours, wages, etc., should be referred for adjustment and by providing for impartial arbitration in the event of the Boards failing to agree. The scheme was accepted at once by eleven railway companies and thirty-five other companies have since subscribed to it. It has worked with remarkable smoothness and holds out a really solid assurance of peace in the railway world for many years to come. Mr. Winston Churchill has shown himself as alert and enterprising a President of the Board of Trade as was his predecessor. The present year will see his Labor Exchanges Act at work all over the country. By that Act Labor Exchanges will be established on a uniform system throughout Great Britain for the purpose of giving information as to where men are wanted and what kinds of jobs are to be had. The buildings in which they are to be housed will offer facilities for washing, for clothes-mending and for non-alcoholic refreshment; separate provision is to be made for men and women and for skilled and unskilled labor; boy labor will be dealt with in co-operation with the local education authority; and travelling expenses can be advanced on loan to workmen for whom situations are procured. In these ways it is hoped, at a

cost of about \$1,000,000 a year, to increase the mobility of labor and to bring the whole problem of unemployment under focus. Another measure standing to Mr. Winston Churchill's credit is the Port of London Act which provides for the purchase of the existing docks and their management henceforward by a Port Authority, amply provided with funds and borrowing powers for improving and extending the docks and dredging the channels of the Thames, and administered by the elected representatives of the traders and ship-owners using the Port. Besides all this, the Liberal Government in the past four years has brought the Board of Trade into far closer and more helpful touch with the business world than it ever was before; has improved the conditions of labor in the Government arsenals, dockyards, and so on; has recognized Trade-Unions of Government employees; has shortened the hours of labor in laundries and has brought under the inspection of the Home Office all industries carried on for profit in charitable and reformatory institutions, such as convents and reformatories; has passed an Act establishing an eight-hour day in coal-mines; has prohibited the use of white phosphorus in the manufacture of matches; has set up a new department for supervising the Mines Regulation Acts; has largely increased the staff of Factory Inspectors; has issued a large number of regulations for safeguarding workers against accident or disease; and has instituted, as a preliminary to legislation, official inquiries into such subjects as the amendment of the Truck Acts; lead-poisoning; the calculation of wages paid by weight in iron and steel trades, in quarries, cement-works, etc.; the conditions of employment in fish-curing; infant mortality among factory workers' children; and the employment of children as half-timers.

At the head of all the measures of social legislation passed by the Liberal Government stands the Old-Age Pensions Act of 1908. By this Act all people of seventy and over except aliens, criminals, lunatics, and persons in receipt of Poor Law Relief, are entitled to a pension not exceeding five shillings (\$1.25) a week, provided their incomes from all sources do not exceed \$157.50 a year. Those with incomes of not more than \$105—and they are the vast majority of the pensioners—draw their five shillings a week from the Post-Office. Those with incomes between \$105 and \$157.50 draw four, three, two or one shilling a week according to a graduated scale. Altogether some 682,000

old men and women have come within the scope of the Act, and when the receipt of Poor Law Relief ceases, as it soon will, to be a disqualification, their numbers will be increased by between 200,000 and 300,000 and the annual charge on the State will amount to little less than \$50,000,000 a year. Another very important measure passed by the Liberals is the Small Holding Acts of 1907. This Act authorized the taking of land compulsorily for Small Holdings and Allotments either by purchase or on lease, and it provided a cheap and easy process for acquiring the land thus procured either, in the case of purchase, at its fair market value, or, in the case of leasing, at a fair rent. It came into operation on January 1st, 1908, and has so far resulted in 23,000 persons applying for over 373,000 acres. Of these 13,200 applicants have been approved by the County Councils and nearly 60,000 acres have been acquired under the Act for their reception. No more significant or successful move has been taken in our time for the repopulation of the English countryside. A third and not less notable measure, the Development Act of 1909, establishes a fund that will probably never be less than \$3,500,000 a year for the purposes of aiding and developing agriculture, forestry and rural industries, of draining and reclaiming land, of improving rural transport, of improving harbours and canals, and of developing fisheries. The Act further sets up a Road Board to spend \$3,000,000 a year—derived from the taxes on motor-cars and petrol—on the extension and improvement of the existing road system.

Another valuable contribution to social reform was made by Mr. John Burns in his Housing and Town-planning Act of 1909. This Act requires every County Council to appoint a Medical Officer of Health who must devote his whole time to his duties; it sets up, and takes power to enforce, a high standard of fitness for human habitation of practically all working-class dwellings throughout the country; it vests the local authorities with new and stringent powers for acquiring land for building purposes and for demolishing unsanitary areas; it prohibits back-to-back houses and cellar dwellings; and for the first time in English history it authorizes schemes for regulating the development of towns on a settled and approved system so as to provide for the needs of public health, social amenities and future growth. A yet more intimate and interesting experiment in social well-being has been

made by the Liberals in connection with children. By an Act passed in 1906 they empowered local Education Authorities to assist voluntary efforts for feeding underfed school-children by providing buildings, furniture, apparatus, etc., the food to be furnished by voluntary effort. In cases where the Education Authority is satisfied that there are children in want of food and that voluntary help is not forthcoming or is inadequate, it may itself provide the food to the extent of a halfpenny rate, recovering from the parent the price for each meal thus supplied to his child. By a second Act passed in 1907 the Liberals provided for the medical inspection of children in elementary schools and empowered the local Education Authorities to make arrangements for their medical treatment. Similarly the Liberals have revised with admirable boldness the Physical Exercises Syllabus in use in the public schools; have limited, or have tried to limit, the employment of children in street trading; have provided for the earlier notification of births in the hope of reducing infant mortality; have taken a hint from American experience in dealing with child offenders; and, finally, have passed an Act, known as the Children Act of 1908, which might better be described as the Children's Charter. I wish I had space to consider this Act with the fulness it deserves. It provides, among other things, for the effective official supervision of all "Homes," orphanages and similar institutions in which young children are nursed and taken charge of for payment. It greatly strengthens the law relating to the prevention of cruelty to children. It makes every case of death by overlaying due to the drunkenness of a parent or guardian a punishable offence. It obliges parents to surround their grates with fire-guards. It insists on a sufficient number of adults being present at children's entertainments to insure their safety in the event of fire or panic. It sets up a "Juvenile Court" for child offenders, sitting at a different time or place from the ordinary court, separates the children from older delinquents, forbids their imprisonment in ordinary gaols, and orders parents to attend the court when their children are charged and to pay the fine if they have been remiss in their parental duties. The Act makes it a penal offence to give alcohol to children under the age of five anywhere, except in case of illness, and children under fourteen are forbidden to enter any part of a saloon. Tobacconists are not allowed to sell cigarettes or cigarette

papers to any one under sixteen; pawnbrokers are forbidden to have dealings with children under twelve and metal and marine store dealers with children under sixteen; and vagrants are prohibited from taking their children with them about the country at such times and in such a way as to deprive them of all education.

In Ireland, though it failed to take the hoped-for step towards devolution, the Liberal Government has accomplished much. It passed an Act restoring to their holdings the two thousand evicted tenants who still survived from the land war of the eighties; it founded a university acceptable to Irish Catholics—a problem that has baffled British statesmanship for a generation and more; it has governed the country by means of the ordinary law and without once resorting to coercion; and just before Parliament was dissolved it succeeded in placing on the Statute-Book an Act that will rescue the policy of land purchase from the deadlock caused by the breakdown of the financial arrangements of the Act of 1903 and will also do something to relieve the congestion and poverty of the West. As Postmaster-General, Mr. Sydney Buxton's record has probably never been equalled for enterprise and efficiency. He has established a penny postage rate for letters between Great Britain and the United States and between Great Britain and nearly all her colonies and dependencies; he has reduced by seventy-five per cent. the postage on newspapers, magazines and trade journals to Canada; he has greatly extended the telephone system which in 1912 becomes the possession of the State; he has acquired for the State the sole ownership of wireless telegraphy; and apart from many minor reforms he has handled the not always tractable staff of the Post-Office with eminent judgment and good feeling. In the sphere of legal reform the Liberals have instituted a Court of Criminal Appeal, have provided for the adoption of the Borstal system in the case of youthful offenders over the age of sixteen, and have altered the law so as to subject habitual criminals to prolonged detention under conditions somewhat less severe than those of ordinary penal servitude. They have not given women the suffrage, but they have passed many Acts for the benefit of the sex; one, for instance, prohibiting night work by women in mines and factories, another enabling a married woman to dispose of her property without the concurrence of her husband, a third legalizing mar-

riage with a deceased wife's sister, and a fourth throwing open the borough and county councils to women rate-payers. As regards finance, their main achievements have been to stop the pernicious practice of borrowing on capital account for current expenditure, to pay off \$235,000,000 of national debt, to differentiate for the purposes of income-tax assessment between earned and unearned incomes, to more than halve the tax on sugar, to abolish the export tax on coal, to reduce the taxes on tea and tobacco, to effect a net yearly decrease of over \$35,000,000 in the taxation account, and to introduce the famous Budget in which Mr. Lloyd George taxed land values, mineral royalties, reversions and undeveloped land, exacted a fair return from the liquor trade for the monopoly it enjoys, and still further graduated the income tax. Their Army reforms are almost too technical for discussion in an American Review, but I think one may fairly say that Mr. Haldane, by organizing a highly efficient expeditionary force of 166,000 men, ready for service at any moment and in any part of the Empire, and by raising on the basis of local patriotism and endeavor a Territorial force of 312,000 for home defence, has proved himself the greatest administrator who has yet directed the British War Office. I think, too, that, in spite of many assertions to the contrary, the Liberals have steered a sound course between needless expenditure and ill-timed economy in the vital question of the Navy and that they have fully maintained the two-power standard.

The Liberals came into office in 1906 pledged to abolish Chinese Labor in South Africa. They have carried out their pledge. By the time this article appears in print it is doubtful whether there will be left on the Rand a single one of the 53,000 Chinamen who were working there three years ago. In other respects, too, the Liberal policy in South Africa has been singularly happy. The grant of responsible self-government to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State was an act of high and generous statesmanship, justified a thousand times over by the union of the four South-African States which has been its magnificent sequel. As a rule, Liberal Governments in the past have been decidedly weak in their Imperial and foreign policies. No such charge can be brought against the Ministry that is now appealing to the country. It has done more than any Government that has yet held office in Great Britain to make the Empire something more than

a glittering abstraction, to knit its component parts together by military, naval and commercial conventions, and to develop the resources of its more backward regions. In India, again, Lord Morley has handled a very difficult and perplexing crisis as one would expect him to handle it—with courage, patience and sympathy; and the large and effective powers of self-government he has entrusted to the natives open up a new, momentous and inspiring era in Anglo-Indian relations. In his conduct of foreign affairs Sir Edward Grey has been even more successful. He was obliged to stand sponsor for, though he probably did not initiate, the futile scheme of disarmament submitted to the Hague Conference, and he failed to appraise with accuracy the forces that were working against him in the Balkan crisis of a year ago. But apart from these two mistakes he has done admirably. He has pretty well wiped the Anglo-American slate clean of all contentious issues; he upheld France with steadfastness and effect during the Algeciras Conference; he has brought about an Agreement between Great Britain, France and Spain for the maintenance in common of their Mediterranean interests; he has negotiated a far-reaching *rapprochement* with Russia; he has reinforced the Alliance with Japan; and throughout the Turkish and the Persian revolutions he displayed cool-headedness, dignity and good sense.

The Liberals have failed in three major and in three minor undertakings. Their efforts to solve the Education problem on the basis of full popular control over all rate-aided schools, the abolition of religious tests for teachers, non-sectarian Bible teaching, and reasonable facilities for special denominations, were foiled by the Lords. Their efforts to assert the supremacy of the State over the liquor trade were likewise frustrated; and the Lords, besides hanging up Mr. Lloyd George's Budget, have rejected a Bill abolishing plural voting, a Scotch Small Landholders' Bill, a Scotch Land Values Bill and a Bill constituting London a single Parliamentary borough. But even though these measures were lost the Liberal record remains one of unique practicality and success, inspired by sincerity and humanity, and remarkably illustrative of the scope and fascination of British political life.

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